P55 / Understanding, explaining, critiquing and measuring Resilience in Public and Social Policy

Topic : Governance, Policy Networks and Coalition

Chair : Matthew Donoghue (University College Dublin)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Overview

Resilience now organises policy thinking across an unusually wide span of domains, including social protection, climate adaptation, migration, household finance, green growth, and national security. While the surface language of resilience is common across these, the meaning of resilience can vary substantially. Likewise resilience can be seen as a governing rationality, a set of capacities, qualities or processes, or an outcome. While scholarly literature works to untangle the specificities of resilience, policy literature often conflates different understandings of resilience resulting in a tautological understanding of resilience-as-resilience. This panel engages with this heterogeneity and sets out a number of objectives:

1) to advance resilience research in public and social policy through increasing engagement with the subject and between scholars

2) To increase our understanding of what resilience is and how it operates within and across policy domains.

Scholarship on resilience is well represented in policy studies, but extends far beyond this into political science, sociology, geography, economics, psychology, law, and beyond the social sciences. Descriptive analytical traditions set out to understand the components of resilience; critical approaches interrogate the use of resilience as a way of redistributing risk from the state to citizen, or as a way of individualising risk; Quantitative comparative work may seek to identify and calibrate indicators of resilience in different domains, while qualitative work may seek to understand the experiences of those attempt to become, or who are compelled to become, resilient, and what that means. Work in systems analysis and risk governance treats resilience as a measurable property of systems, and asks how it can be built into infrastructure, economies and institutions. Each tradition has developed sophisticated tools, yet dialogue between these traditions could be enhanced.

The panel is organised around core questions:

1) How is resilience operationalised, or how does resilience manifest, across domains - what is made resilient, against what, and on whose authority?

2) What are the distributive consequences of resilience, whether in terms of finance, power, risk or autonomy etc.?

3) What is the future of resilience? Should it be further embedded, critiqued, jettisoned, reformed? And what should resilience look like in the future?

The panel's relevance to public policy scholarship extends past resilience itself. Concepts that command cross-spectrum consensus while conflating issues or collapsing differences in principle and practice into one another have become more common. Resilience provides a strong case for studying how consensus is produced, sustained and occasionally broken. It is also an opportunity to further understand the variegation of resilience across diverse policy areas, identifying similarities and differences in content, practice and outcome.

This panel draws upon an edited book entitled A Research Agenda for Resilience in Social and Public Policy (Edward Elgar, Forthcoming 2027).

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite papers examining any facet of resilience or resilience thinking related to public and social policy.

In particular, we are interested in how resilience is conceptualised, operationalised, analysed and evaluated both in the scholarly literature and in the policy literature. We welcome empirical and theoretical papers from any methodological and theoretical tradition. Case studies are particularly welcome, but not essential.

Our aim with the panel is to increase dialogue on, and knowledge of, resilience research across policy studies, while contributing to future research on this subject.

Specific topics of interest include (but are not restricted to):

1) Resilience as governing strategy: How resilience framings shape policy instruments, conditionality and administrative practice — in national reform strategies, EU recovery instruments, or sectoral programmes.

2) Resilience in theory and practice: How is resilience understood, and by whom? How should it be understood? How is it experienced by different groups? What is the purpose of resilience?

3) Domain-specific applications: e.g. Climate adaptation and just transitions; migration and crisis absorption; household and financial resilience; family and lifecourse perspectives; green growth; security, grey-zone and hybrid threats.

4) Distributive consequences: Who is made responsible for resilience, how risk and responsibility is distributed, and what are the costs of resilience.

5) Resilience and social justice: Whether and how resilience can contribute to processes of equality and social justice, and what multi-dimensional or justice-centred frameworks add or obscure.

6) Measurement and method: Approaches to studying resilience empirically — indicator construction, discourse and corpus analysis, biographical and qualitative longitudinal methods, systems modelling, comparative designs.

Abstracts should state the research problem and associated questions to be addressed, methodology or approach (as appropriate), anticipated or actual findings or reflections (as appropriate), and the paper's contribution to furthering our understanding of resilience as a phenomenon, process, outcome, set of qualities/capacities, or as a governing logic etc.

We especially welcome contributions from Early Career Researchers (PhDs, postdocs and those starting lectureships or similar), as well as more established researchers and scholars.